



## **Spinach** **Fact Sheet**



### **Where did it come from?**

Spinach is thought to be of Persian origin. It was first brought to Europe in the ninth century when it was introduced to Spain by Persian Arabs, who gave the plant its name. It was also grown in Italy as a Lenten food and was planted in the fall and picked in February, just in time for Lent, when meat cannot be consumed. Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, spinach has become a versatile and commonly used vegetable in the United States.






### **Where does it grow?**

Spinach is grown throughout the country including Alaska, California, Connecticut, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia and Washington. California is responsible for over one half of the production of spinach in the United States. Texas is the next largest producer of spinach, yielding one third of the total crop production. New Jersey has significant acreage of spinach grown throughout the state.




### **How does it grow?**

Spinach is a green, leafy plant that grows close to the ground. The stems of the leaves grow straight up from the ground in clusters. Spinach is composed of a taproot, which is a type of root that grows downwards into the soil, with branching roots toward the surface of the soil. Leaves usually grow 6 to 8 inches long. Spinach is considered a hardy cool season crop, which can be grown almost anywhere within the United States, but grows best in 50°- 60°F temperatures. It is available to purchase year-round. Its best seasons are in the fall and spring because it grows good in cool, damp weather.

### **Is it healthy?**

-  Good source of iron, fiber, folic acid, magnesium and manganese
-  To improve iron absorption in spinach, eat vitamin C rich foods such as orange juice, citrus fruits or tomatoes with your spinach
-  Provides high amount of vitamin A and good amounts of vitamins C and K
-  Contains more protein than most other vegetables
-  Contains the phytochemical (*pronounce "fight-o-chemical"*) lutein (*pronounce "loo-teen"*) which keeps your eyes healthy

### **How do you pick good ones?**

-  Select green and crisp leaves with a fresh, sweet fragrance
-  Spinach leaves should have a springy texture
-  Avoid leaves that are limp, damaged or spotted

# ☺ FUN FACTS! ☺

## Spinach

### Did you know...

- ☺ **Did you know there are three different varieties of spinach?**  
(Flat or Smooth Leaf which has smooth leaves, Savoy which has curly leaves and Semi-Savoy which has slightly curly leaves.)
- ☺ **Did you know that spinach is good for you?**
- ☺ **Did you know you can find spinach in your local supermarket in the following forms --- fresh, canned or frozen?**
- ☺ **Did you know spinach contains phytochemicals** (*pronounce "fight-o-chemicals"*), **which helps protect themselves from insects and helps protect your health too?**
- ☺ **Did you know eating and preparing spinach is simple because it can be eaten raw or cooked?**
- ☺ **Did you know raw spinach provides 3 grams of protein per 3 cup serving?**
- ☺ **Did you know spinach can contain a lot of grainy dirt particles and, therefore, should be washed thoroughly and gently to avoid tearing the leaves?**
- ☺ **Did you know slightly damp spinach can be steamed or microwaved without adding any additional water?**

### Remember ...

**Include 5 - 9 servings of fruits and vegetables per day!**



## School Food Service Link.....

Quick Steps to 5 - 9 servings of fruits and vegetables per day at school...

*Listed below are suggestions that you may choose at your own discretion*

### DOD (Department of Defense):

- ✓ Call Leslie Bowen to place orders: 1-800-795-3523
- ✓ An assortment of fresh and pre-cut fresh produce is available from DOD at economical prices!

### RECIPES:

- ✓ Try a new recipes with spinach ---  
Warm Spinach Salad (see attached)  
Turkey Pita Pizzazz (see attached)  
Orange Spinach Salad with Honey Dill Dressing (see attached)  
Spinach Dip (see attached)
- ✓ Offer fresh spinach salads with hard boiled eggs as a lunch choice
- ✓ Offer pizza with toppings of cooked spinach
- ✓ Add cooked, chopped spinach to soups, tomato sauce, rice, and pasta dishes
- ✓ Add fresh spinach leaves to iceberg and/or romaine lettuce for a colorful nutritious salad
- ✓ Add fresh spinach leaves, instead of iceberg lettuce, as a sandwich topping

### MARKETING:

- ✓ Contact the "Leafy Greens Council" for posters and other resources  
They also have a great website --- Check it out!  
Call: Ray Clark at 1-651-484-3321 [www.leafy-greens.org](http://www.leafy-greens.org)
- ✓ Advertise and highlight the fruit or vegetable of the month on your menu
- ✓ Refer to "Fruits & Vegetables Galore" Kit (*Meal Appeal Manual*) page 9

### PROMOTIONS:

- ✓ Promote a "Sticker Day" with prizes on featured fruit/vegetable menu day;  
Give this menu a special name (*Examples: Super Star Spinach! Sensational Spinach Day!*)
- ✓ Feature "Green Day" on the day that you offer spinach on your menu
  - ✓ Encourage the entire school to get involved
  - ✓ Reward students with a small prize if they are wearing green
- ✓ May is "Salad Month" --- Celebrate by featuring a variety of exciting salads as vegetable choices; Try different types of leaves in your salads such as fresh spinach, romaine, red leafy greens, and cabbage red and/or green...
- ✓ Refer to "Fruits & Vegetables Galore" Kit (*Meal Appeal Manual*) pages 16-31

#### **Presentation Meal Appeal -----**

**Vary Colors for Eye Appeal:**  
Add Spinach to Iceberg and  
Romaine for a Colorful Healthy  
Tossed Salad!

#### **Quality:**

For Crisp Spinach  
Leaves ---  
Wash and Pat Dry  
Just Before Using!

#### **Safety:**

Wash Spinach  
Leaves Thoroughly  
Before Use!



## **School Food Service Link.....**



## **School Food Service Recipes**



# **Warm Spinach Salad**

**Serving Size:** ½ cup

**Recipe From:** SNA Database

**Yield:** 200

**Source:** NH Department of Education

### **Ingredients:**

- 20 oz. Spinach
- 1/2 cup or 4 oz. Olive Oil
- 8 onions Red Onions, Sliced
- 2 cups or 16 oz. Balsamic Vinegar
- 2 cups. Olive Oil
- 2 cups. Almonds, Toasted, Sliced or Silvered
- 24 each Apples, Red Delicious

### **Directions:**

1. Wash and de-vein spinach, removing stems. Air-dry spinach or put into a salad spinner until dry.
2. Heat olive oil in large sauté pan or tilt skillet.
3. Halve apples lengthwise and cut into quarters. Remove cores. Slice into long thin slices.
4. Skin and slice onion in half. Slice into thin strips or julienne.
5. Add apples and onions to hot olive oil and sauté until slightly wilted and red onion begins to bleed.
6. De-glaze pan with balsamic vinegar and remove from heat. Add remainder of olive oil and toss hot onion apple mixture into washed and dried spinach. Toss well.
7. Serve 1/2 cup per portion with garnish of toasted almonds.

HACCP Tips: Wash hands and clean all food preparation surfaces.



## **School Food Service Link.....**



## **School Food Service Recipes**



### **Turkey Pita Pizzazz**

**Serving Size:** ½ Pita

**Recipe From:** SNA Database

**Yield:** 100

#### **Ingredients:**

- 50 6-in. Pita pockets, whole wheat or white Dry
- 3 lbs., 2 oz. Spinach leaves, wilted
- 6 lbs., 4 oz. Turkey breast, cooked, julienne Leaves
- 6 lbs., 4 oz. Mozzarella cheese, shredded Canned
- 1 tsp Garlic, minced Canned
- 8 each Bay Leaf Crushed,
- 1 Tbsp., 1 tsp. Basil Leaves, Dry Canned
- 2 tsps. Thyme Leaves,
- 1/4 tsp. White Pepper
- 1 Tbsp., 1 tsp. Oregano
- 1/2 cup. Tomato Juice,
- 1 qt. Tomato Sauce,
- 3 1/2 cups Tomatoes,

#### **Directions:**

1. Combine garlic, spices and tomato juice in a saucepan or steam kettle. Boil and reduce until nearly dry.
2. Add tomato sauce and tomatoes. Bring to a boil and simmer for 10 minutes.
3. Remove from heat. Remove bay leaves.
4. Spread 1 oz. tomato sauce over each whole pita bread.
5. Place 1/4 cup lightly blanched spinach on sauce and top with 2 oz. turkey.
6. Place 2 oz. (or 1/2 cup) shredded cheese on top of turkey.
7. Bake in a conventional oven at 350° F for 13 minutes or a convection oven at 350° F for 8 minutes, until cheese is melted.
8. Cut into halves and serve one half per portion.

**HACCP Tips:** Wash hands and clean all food preparation surfaces



## **School Food Service Link.....**



## **School Food Service Recipes**



### **Orange Spinach Salad with Honey Dill Dressing**

**Serving Size:** ½ cup

**Yield:** Approx. 30 each

#### **Ingredients:**

- 10 oz. Fresh Spinach Toss.
- 1 Head Iceberg lettuce
- 2 Tablespoons Onions, Diced
- 2 Tablespoons Green Pepper, Diced
- 2 Large Oranges, Peeled & Sectioned
- 1 Cucumber, Shredded

#### **Directions:**

Place all ingredients in bowl.

### **Honey Dill Dressing**

**Serving Size:** 1 Tablespoon

**Yield:** 2 cups or 32 Servings

#### **Ingredients:**

- 1 ½ cups Low-Fat Mayonnaise
- ¼ cup Honey
- 2 Tablespoons Lemon juice
- 2 Tablespoons Dill Weed

#### **Directions:**

Mix all ingredients in bowl.

Pour over salad or serve on side.

### **Yummy Spinach Dip**

#### **Ingredients:**

**Yield:** Approx. 4 cups

- 2 each 10 oz. Packages Frozen Chopped Spinach, Thawed
- ½ cup Mild White Onion, Finely Chopped
- 3 Cloves Garlic, Finely Chopped
- 2 cups Raw Red Pepper, Finely Chopped
- 1 cup Low-Fat Sour Cream
- 1 cup Low-Fat Mayonnaise
- Optional: Salt & Pepper for Additional Seasoning
- Assorted Colorful Raw Vegetables for Dipping

#### **Directions:**

Squeeze the water out of the spinach, and place the spinach in a mixing bowl. Stir in the onion, garlic, red pepper, sour cream, and mayonnaise. Season with salt and pepper. Let the dip sit at room temperature for 1 hour for the flavors to mix. Stir again before serving. This dip keeps well refrigerated for 1 week.

**Recipe From: Dole Food Company, Inc.**